

STUART JUDGE

Obituary

Peter G H Clarke 29 December 1946 – 16 September 2015



Peter Clarke became a Christian when he was eleven years old. He read Engineering Science at Oxford, where he was at St Peter's College. When asked at interview why he chose St Peter's he said that as his twin brother was called John, they had decided that the brother would apply to St John's and Peter to St Peter's. After graduating in 1968 in the top ten per cent of his year, he went on to do a PhD in Neuroscience under Donald MacKay at the University of Keele. I first met him there when he was starting as a PhD student and I was a final year undergraduate. He was a tall, winsome, well-spoken young man with an engaging sense of humour. After completing his PhD on visual motion-evoked human scalp-evoked potentials, Peter went back to Oxford to do research on the neurophysiology of vision under the distinguished physiologist David Whitteridge. His work with Whitteridge resulted in a fine series of papers on vision and visual development in the cat and sheep, as well as single author papers on his work on pigeon vision. Peter then spent a year working in St Louis with Max Cowan, a very influential neuroanatomist and pioneer in developmental biology. That year set the direction for the rest of Peter's scientific career. During his time in the USA he was able to meet many leading neurophysiologists. His judgement of people was excellent, and I am much in his debt for giving me a quick run down of who-was-who when I was considering where to seek a post-doctoral position.

After a period back in Oxford, in 1977 Peter took a position in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he spent the rest of his career and became a world-renowned expert on the various causes of brain cells dying – either appropriately because they have failed to form effective connections, or through the 'excito-toxicity' that is thought to be the key mechanism by which strokes kill nerve cells. His work contributed to giving chemists new leads on possible pharmacological interventions to reduce the damage caused by strokes.

Peter was an Associate Editor of *Science and Christian Belief*, an Associate of the Faraday Institute and active in the French Network of Evangelical Scientists. He wrote three books on science and faith: *Dieu, l'homme et le cerveau: Les défis des neurosciences*, Paris: Croire publications (2011), *Science et christianisme: conflit ou complémentarité?*, Lyon: Editions Première Partie (2014) and *All in the Mind? Does Neuroscience*

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Faith Challenge?, Oxford: Lion Hudson (2015). Reviewing Peter's last book in this journal, Malcolm Jeeves, who had first met Peter when he was a research student with Donald MacKay, captured something of Peter's deep faith, learning and wisdom when he wrote, 'I strongly recommend it as a "must read". No unjustified scientific triumphalism here, rather a careful, measured, realistic assessment of "the way the world is" in light of contemporary insights from neuroscience and related disciplines into our mysterious human nature.'

In 1979 he married a Czech colleague, Stephanie, like Peter a committed evangelical Christian. They had two daughters. Their daughter Christine died of cancer in 2013, the same year that Peter was diagnosed as having metastasised cancer of the prostate.

Peter's Christian faith was deep, and later in life he was unable to speak of Christ's death without tears coming to his eyes. He finished his earlier book with the words 'This world is not a theme park, but a rugged mountain where we can climb and tire ourselves. As a Christian, I want to devote myself body and soul to love God and my fellow men, to discover the truth about the creation of God.'¹

1 Ce monde n'est pas un parc de loisirs, mais plutôt une montagne accidentée où nous pouvons grimper et nous fatiguer. En tant que chrétien, je veux me consacrer corps et âme à aimer Dieu et mes semblables, à découvrir la vérité sur la création de Dieu.